



SERPPAS Focus Area: Threatened, Endangered and At-Risk Species

The Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) Threatened, Endangered, and At-Risk Species Work Group collaborates with federal, state, and other partners to develop and promote innovative strategies for proactive conservation of at-risk species and increased flexibility for addressing impacts to both listed species and military missions. These approaches include conservation agreements, mitigation credit strategies, and projects to increase status information of at-risk species to inform Species Status Assessments conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to inform listing decisions.

The SERPPAS Threatened, Endangered and At-Risk Species Work Group consists of representatives from DoD and the military services, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and State Wildlife Agencies.

Background

Military installations provide habitat for significant populations of federally-listed and at-risk species. These species can and do adversely impact training and testing on military installations due to Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements. At-risk species are defined as those species which have been proposed for listing by the USFWS, designated as candidate species by the USFWS, or which the USFWS has been petitioned to list under the ESA. Over the next seven years, the USFWS will have to make listing decisions to determine whether protections under the ESA are necessary for hundreds of candidate, petitioned, and proposed at-risk species.

The SERPPAS state and federal partners share a desire to conserve as many at-risk species and their habitats as possible to minimize or eliminate the need for species listings. This proactive approach delivers conservation of species and habitats, and avoids the

Mission Benefit

These efforts will promote and support ecosystem restoration, maintenance and monitoring on and off military installations to (1) enhance the conservation of at-risk and listed species, (2) increase flexibility for on-installation training, (3) increase regulatory predictability for military services, other federal agencies, and private landowners who engage in proactive conservation, and (4) provide a process for DoD and other partners to share species data that will inform regulatory decisions.

Milestones

- ▶ In 2005, in response to petitions to list the gopher tortoise in the eastern part of its range, SERPPAS partners began work on a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) for the gopher tortoise.
- ▶ In February 2012, the SERPPAS Steering Committee formed a Candidate Conservation Issue Team, later re-named the "Threatened, Endangered and At Risk Species Work Group," to address the large number of candidate and petitioned species for Federal listing under the ESA. The Team was tasked with developing recommendations for actions by SERPPAS partners to address the impact of potential Federal listing of more than 400 additional species in the next decade. They were also tasked to develop cooperative conservation efforts among the partners to improve the status of candidate and petitioned species to help avoid the need for Federal protection.
- ▶ In 2012, the Fish and Wildlife Service completed the Biological Opinion on the U.S. Marine Corps Recovery and Sustainment Program (RASP) for the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) at Camp Lejeune. The RASP establishes a process for the U.S. Marine Corps to have increased flexibility in meeting the recovery goals for the red-cockaded woodpecker at Camp Lejeune.



Background (cont..)

development of additional ESA-mandated regulations and potential restrictions on military training activities that may impact the species and/or their habitats. The SERPPAS partners are also working to develop and implement approaches for listed species which will provide increased mission flexibility for military services and other partners.

- ▶ In 2016, the USFWS published the National Listing Workplan creating a schedule for listing determinations for candidate and petitioned species during the period 2017 to 2023. The USFWS began using the Species Status Assessment (SSA) process for all listing determinations as well as for delisting and downlisting determinations. An SSA is a focused, repeatable, and rigorous assessment of a species' ability to maintain self-sustaining populations over time. This assessment is based on the best available scientific and commercial information regarding life history, biology, and consideration of current and future vulnerabilities. The result is a single document that delivers foundational science for informing all ESA decisions, including listing determinations, consultations, grant allocations, permitting, and recovery planning.

Accomplishments

- ▶ In 2008, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Defense, Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, Air Force, U.S. Forest Service, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, American Forest Foundation, and the Poarch Band of Creek Indian Agency Organizations signed a Candidate Conservation Agreement for the Gopher Tortoise. The CCA identified conservation measures that would be taken by participating agencies and organizations and established a process for sharing information.
- ▶ In March 2017, the Department of Defense Gopher Tortoise Conservation and Crediting Strategy was signed by Department of Defense, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and State Wildlife Agencies in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. The Strategy will contribute to the conservation of the gopher tortoise while providing predictability to the military services for training and testing should the gopher tortoise become listed in the future.
- ▶ In April 2018, the Fish and Wildlife Service, with support from Department of Defense, completed a Species Status Assessment for the red-cockaded woodpecker. The SSA will inform an evaluation of the status of the red-cockaded woodpecker to date and will be considered when a decision regarding listing status is made.
- ▶ On April 30 2018, the U.S. Marine Corps, Fish and Wildlife Service and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission completed an agreement to restore habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker at the Bear Gardens Tract of the Holly Shelter Game Lands. This project will be evaluated under the Recovery and Sustainment Program and will provide flexibility to the Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune with regard to impacts that may occur to the red-cockaded woodpecker.

Future Focus Area Objectives

The SERPPAS Threatened, Endangered, and At-Risk Species Work Group serves as a forum for partners across the Southeast to connect, share and advance together. The work group will continue to focus on the development and implementation of projects and programs that support pro-active conservation of species and habitats, and increased flexibility for addressing related impacts. The objectives of the work group for 2018 – 2020 are as follows:

- ▶ Develop and implement programs to conserve at-risk and listed species through habitat and multi-species crediting strategies and other conservation efforts that provide direct benefits to military installations (both on and off installations).
- ▶ Support Species Status Assessments for those species, like the gopher tortoise and red-cockaded woodpecker, that have high potential to impact training and testing on military installations.



- ▶ Based on determined mutual need, emphasize and enable efforts to increase, enhance and sustain ecosystems through the conservation and restoration of lands in priority landscapes that can be managed to provide habitat for priority species and that will contribute to a larger conservation goal.
- ▶ Increase targeted habitat management for isolated wetlands to benefit at-risk species.
- ▶ Develop and implement approaches to “avoid and minimize” impacts to at-risk species from emerging developments such as utility scale solar facilities.

Photo credits:

page 1, Longleaf–Pitcher Plant Bog in North Carolina by Addie Thornton, SERPPAS

page 2, Gopher Tortoise Sign—2016 SERPPAS Principals Meeting at Fort Benning by Addie Thornton, SERPPAS

page 3, Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, Southeastern Outdoors, <http://www.southeasternoutdoors.com/wildlife/birds/articles/red-cockaded-relocated-alabama.html>